

TRIGG COUNTY GROUND BREAKING

Monday, November 26, 2007

Judge Humphries, members of the Trigg County Fiscal Court, Judge Woodall, Judge Redd, other distinguished office holders, and to my fellow citizens of Trigg County, and west Kentucky, and all other guests and friends. It is a singular honor for me to be given the opportunity to make appropriate remarks at this remarkable occasion. Remarkable because history deems it so.

We are grateful today for those who have helped to bring us to this grand occasion – Chief Justice Lambert; our legislators; our current Fiscal Court and Judge Executive, as well as his predecessor; the judicial building committee; the representatives from AOC; Codell, our construction manager; and our architect CMW.

We are standing today on the old court grounds high above this city, high above the plains, hills and hollows of this county – the high ground of justice. The earth we will ceremonially turn in a few minutes is the same earth our forefathers turned with meager mattocks and spades and with humble hearts for the same purpose which is shared with us today – to keep the temple of justice on the high ground. Through wars, through famine, through good times and bad, justice rules eternal here in this beloved community upon this high ground. We here today are blessed to be given this grand opportunity once again to stamp our mark upon the corporal face of justice. In the words of Rupert Brooke, “God be thanked who has matched us with this hour.”

In choosing this site, the people of Trigg County have once again resoundingly chosen the high ground for their seat of justice. They have not been lured to the more convenient, less imposing commercial fringes of the city, but here to this special place where history repeats itself in this day’s ceremony.

Our justice system is not perfect. Within this structure about to rise above our heads, not all people aggrieved will be rectified; not all guilty persons convicted; not all the innocent reprieved. For just as this edifice is built with human hands, so are the mighty cogs and wheels of justice turned by mortals

– wings for angels, feet for men. But to both the living and the dead, to the master spirits of our deceased ancestors and to lives yet unborn, we make this pledge. We shall continue the arduous pursuit of equal justice in this city on a hill.

Many of us in this group today are blessed with blood lines running back across many generations to this ground. Many of us here are the heirs of those very men and women who were the first to claim this place as their home. My Scottish ancestor, William Cunningham, served as an election officer for the very first election held in this county. He was a member of the first Circuit Court jury and a road commissioner for the wild and virgin lands of the western part of this county. A man who served on that first jury with William Cunningham was a man by the name of Willis Minton. In an ironic and wonderful twist of history, Willis Minton was an ancestor of my fellow Supreme Court justice, John Minton, Jr. So in a real and human way, the state's highest court today is rooted to this place.

Go with me for a moment back to the beginning. On May 15, 1820, the very first Fiscal Court of Trigg County received and adopted this report from the search committee for a new courthouse: "After a mature and deliberate examination of the many different places as sites for the administration of justice at and near the center of said county, we are of the opinion that the seat of justice be fixed on the lands of Robert Baker where he now lives on Main Little River on top of the eminence above the spring at or to include the lot where his stable now stands, it being the most central, convenient, and eligible site for the purpose. Whereupon the said Robert Baker has this day obligated himself to convey to said county court of Trigg for the use of said county together with 50 acres more to be laid off in right angle from the square, which bond we here submit as part of the report, likewise several promissory notes, given as donations. Given under our hands and seals this 15th day of May, 1820."

So, as you can see this place where ground is turned today for a magnificent temple of justice was once the place of a humble stable. And we all know what great things have come from a humble stable.

The world has turned many times since that time. Courthouses have risen and fallen. Human perfidy, sin, debauchery, and crime have continued to plague our community and our nation. But we still follow that dream and that vision of justice for all. We still take arms against the sea of trouble.

We still believe that it is our duty – sometimes failing but ever sure – to treat our fellow travelers upon this planet with respect. Knowing that we are all lonely travelers to a sure end where God's justice will be our ultimate destination.

That is why we follow the sky. Why we look upward ever seeking higher ground. We not only seek higher ground, but common ground – common ground with a very uncommon purpose. For here the staff of the beggar and the scepter of the prince lay side by side. This ground knows not race or religion, neither wealth nor poverty. It knows and weighs all alike in the hovering scale of justice.

From the high portals of this edifice, one will be able to see the surrounding beauty of this glorious land – the soft and rolling hills painted by the changing seasons. According to ancient scripture, “A land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.” This storied place, this land that we love, and this justice center that we build, will be here long after we are gone.

Does it humble you – as it does me – that as our mortal remains molder to dust? That this place, this land, will remain and endure? Who will remember that we were here this day under this winter sky, turning this ground for faces yet unseen and generations still to be born? Few, if any. But a common cord will be weaved, unseen and unknown between us and the heirs of our ideals – just like we are connected today to those pioneers of yesteryear in one electric circle of hope and justice.

This afternoon pride is in the air in bracing whiffs. Pride in our rich heritage. Pride in our country, our Commonwealth, our community. Pride in what Trigg County has been and what it can become. So let me ask you as I close to lift your eyes beyond this hill and this city. Beyond the rolling meadows and woodlands which surround us. Beyond this day. Beyond the fears, uncertainties and terrors of our time to the hopes and dreams of tomorrow. Beyond ourselves and our lives upon this planet. Always with the fervent prayer that the human spirit within this building about to rise toward the sky will forever hold to the high ground of justice.